

Dealing with Resistance

Common Reactions to Diversity Training (adapted from Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997)

A. Resistance

1. Claim that the status quo is part of a “natural order”
2. Invalidation of target group members’ experiences
3. Agents’ need to have own pain and hurt recognized
4. Protection of agent group members by target group members
5. Agents focus on an identity in which they are members of the targeted group
6. Invalidation of the instructor/facilitator
7. Invalidation of the training
8. Anecdote raised to the status of generalized fact
9. Domination of discussion
10. Hostile silence

B. Anger

C. Immobilization

1. Withdrawal from participation
2. Sense of powerlessness to change oppressive conditions
3. Fear of being perceived as a bigot
4. Agent guilt about their agent status
5. Fear of conflict and disagreement

D. Distancing

1. The need to see only the most extreme bigots as agents of oppression
2. Willing to focus on the oppression of targets, but not on the privilege of agents

E. Conversion

1. Correcting others
2. Romanticizing target groups
3. Reversing power dynamics
4. Demonizing agent groups

Working with mandated attendees

Offer alternatives for those not present voluntarily: “You can leave but if asked, I won’t say you were here.” Or “How can I make this useful to you?”

Causes of Resistance

(Goodman, 2011)

- Emotions and experiences of privileged group members are real. That doesn't mean their hurt and pain are synonymous with oppression. However, denying the reality of their feelings is likely to foster resistance.
- People would rather be victims than oppressors and thus avoid focusing on their privilege; it is less painful to focus on their pain as targeted group members.
- Arguing, trivializing, and avoiding are all signs of cognitive dissonance, which is inherent in maintaining sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression.
- People are strongly motivated to preserve their self-images as caring, just, competent people and to avoid guilt and shame.
- Some people see more equitable society as one in which they will lose not only wealth or power, but the basics needed for survival.

Preventing/Limiting Resistance

1. Develop and hold the group to their ground rules.
2. Role model respectful behavior.
3. Separate intent from effect.
4. Use "I" statements.
5. Develop common definition of terms.
6. Respect the development of understanding of social justice issues / assume that participants are reflecting what they've been taught and rewarded for believing and that they are not innately evil for holding oppressive beliefs.
7. Do not ask members to speak for all members of their group (i.e., don't ask the only Chicana student in the section to speak for all Chicanas).
8. Don't assume that you have no members of "invisible" target groups in your group (e.g., people with disabilities, LGBT people, foster-care alumni, people who are not Christian, etc.).
9. Know that resistance is a natural part of the process and don't get too overwhelmed with trying to prevent it.
10. Others?

Addressing Resistance

1. Be clear that participants' evaluations are not dependent on their responses.
2. Provide accurate information when participants present misinformation.
3. Use multiple sources for information (websites, readings, outside speakers, videos) to establish credibility of information.
4. In volatile situations, stop the discussion and ask participants to reflect in writing on what is happening; discuss in pairs.
5. Talk about what has happened without targeting the individual(s); ignoring inappropriate behavior gives the message you condone it.
6. Allow participants to meet in homogeneous caucus groups to share reactions and experiences.
7. Treat all participant expressions with respect.
8. Invite participants to make appointments to further discuss these issues with you outside the training session.
9. Provide participants constructive ways to express their anger, pain or doubt which do not target group members or facilitators: journals, letters to the paper on specific issues, paired discussions, meetings outside the training session.
10. Help participants identify people who have made change and processes for making change. Provide historical context of change movements. Brainstorm individual action strategies.
11. Build attention to privilege into training design, how privileged groups benefit from it and are also limited by the existence of oppression; don't focus solely on issues of target groups.
12. Create a "parking lot" for related but not immediately relevant ideas and questions.

Responding to Resistance

(from Goodman, 2000, pp. 165-170)

1. Paraphrase or repeat back what they said.
2. Ask for more information.
3. Express empathy first.
4. Play clueless.
5. Challenge the stereotype.
6. Encourage empathy.
7. Tell them they're too good/smart for that.
8. Highlight commonalities.
9. Consider *What's In It for Them*.
10. Express your feelings.
11. Use humor.
12. Appeal to values and principles.
13. Share your own process.
14. Point out policies or laws that prohibit such conduct.

Sources

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Goodman, D. J. (2011). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups*. New York, NY: Routledge.